

ARTICLE IN THE FREE PRESS APRIL 15TH 2023 THE MARSHMALLOW FACTORY

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2023
Free Press

Intersection

where life meets culture

F9

GOOEY AND GOURMET



Dena and Brandon Desrosiers, owners of the Marshmallow Factory, with their sons Tyson, left, and Kenzie, and some of their many innovative flavours of marshmallows.

Hobby baker's whim ends up injecting creativity, variety into marshmallow market

DAVID SANDERSON

WITH the puck set to drop on the Stanley Cup playoffs in a matter of days, let's kick things off with a yarn that's one part hockey, two parts marshmallows.

Dena and Brandon Desrosiers are the married couple behind the Marshmallow Factory, an enterprise that turns out more than two dozen varieties of small-batch, gourmet marshmallows. This past winter, their son Tyson's hockey team, the U18 St. James Canucks, was going through a rough patch in the schedule, when they showed up to a game with a stack of marshmallows for the players to snack on, between periods.

"Their jerseys are blue and white, so we made the guys some blueberry-vanilla marshmallows, hoping it might bring them a bit of energy and, hopefully, some good luck," says Dena, seated next to Brandon in a Portage Avenue coffee shop, minutes away from the St. James abode they share with their two sons and a teenage nephew who lives with them.

Well, wouldn't you know it? Not only were the Canucks triumphant that night, the club proceeded to go on an extended winning streak, all while fuelled by the Desrosiers' pillowy treats.

Unfortunately, all good-tasting things must come to an end.

Completely tied up with orders, Dena and Brandon failed to bring marshmallows to a deciding playoff game against the Fort Garry Flyers. The same way chowing down on marshmallows wasn't why the Canucks won all those games, not having them in the dressing room wasn't the reason they lost in the final, Dena says, taking a sip of her coffee.

"But then, I guess we'll never really know for sure, will we?" her husband interjects, with a wink.

CONTINUED

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2023

Free Press

CONTINUED FROM F9



The Marshmallow Factory's marshmallows are prepared in slab form before being cut into individual pieces after cooling.

LAST July, Dena and Brandon were hosting friends at their seasonal site at Hill Top Resort, near Grand Beach. The group was seated around a campfire and Brandon excused himself to fetch a bag of generic, store-bought marshmallows, for roasting purposes. Later, he remarked that it was too bad there isn't much choice at the grocery store when it comes to marshmallows, to which everybody nodded their head in agreement.

He repeated that sentiment a couple of weeks later, when he, Dena and the boys were enjoying a backyard barbecue. Only on that occasion, he chose to put his money where his marshmallow-craving mouth was, by heading inside to look up recipes on the Internet. Upon discovering the primary ingredients to be water, sugar, gelatin, corn syrup and vanilla, all of which he had at his disposal, the self-described hobby baker went to work, adding melted chocolate at the end, in an effort to enhance the flavour.

Dena and the guys were impressed with how his marshmallows turned out, so he repeated the process days later, replacing the chocolate with peanut butter, one of Dena's guilty pleasures. Again, they couldn't devour the marshmallows, which are prepared in slab form before being cut into individual pieces once they've cooled, fast enough. Telling himself practice makes perfect, he kept at it, so much so that recipients — everyone from family members to pals to co-workers — told him repeatedly that if he ever made up his mind to sell his marshmallows, they'd be first in line to grab a bag.

The timing of it all was highly interesting, Dena points out. For months, Brandon had been having issues with his back and neck, owing to a long career as a home renovator. They had discussed the possibility of him seeking a less-physical line of work somewhere down the line, only they never would have imagined such a move might involve marshmallows.

(A quick Google search tells us gourmet marshmallows have been trending for a number of years. Chicago-based 30 Marshmallows turns out such creative types as lavender-honey, Florida's Vivètre offers a bacon-bourbon sort, while a shop in Edinburgh laces some of its melt-in-your-mouth goodies with locally produced Inis & Gunn beer.)

The Marshmallow Factory made its official debut at a November 2022 craft show near the Desrosiers' home. Dena laughs, noting the comment they heard most often that afternoon was, "Sorry, but I'm not a big fan of marshmallows." Their response? Here, try a free sample of what the two of them were billing as "not your average, everyday marshmallow."

The samples must have worked, because we were far and away the busiest table there. Dena says, recalling they had six flavours for sale that day, including mint chocolate chip and bubble-gum. They enjoyed an equal amount of success two weeks later, at a pre-Christmas sale at the St. James Civic Centre. At the end of the day, as they started down a table completely void of bags, they turned to one another and said, "Hey, we might be on to something, here."

It didn't take long until the Desrosiers had established a retail presence. By the end of January, their line of goods was available at the Locals on Sterling Lyon Parkway, as well as at such far-flung spots as Port McNeill, B.C.'s Muzg 20 Coffee House and Kitscoty, Alta.'s Farnstead Market & More.

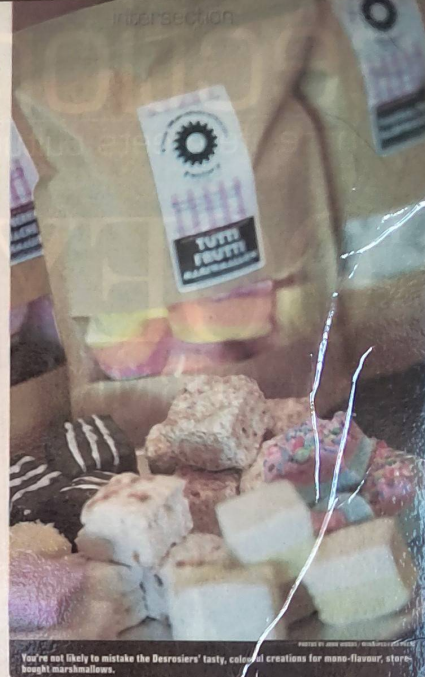
Kim Flaig is one of the owners of the Cozy Fox, a newly opened shop in Selkirk wholly stocked with made-in-Manitoba products. Flaig learned about the Marshmallow Factory ahead of her store's March 5 grand opening. Unfamiliar with gourmet marshmallows, she did a "deep dive" to see if the business would be a good fit for the Cozy Fox's fine foods section.

"The marshmallows have been flying off the shelves, with salted caramel and sponge toffee and chocolate seemingly being the favourites," Flaig says when reached at the store, located on Selkirk's Morris Avenue. "They've been a great addition and have attracted repeat customers, not only from town, but from the Interlake area, as well."

It's much the same story at Winnipeg's L.O.V.E. Vendor Market at 1729 Main St., where the Desrosiers' marshmallows have been a fixture for two months already.

"Dena came into the store when we were at the Garden City Shopping Centre, to talk about their marshmallows," says Amanda Woodard, L.O.V.E.'s owner. "We now carry as many flavours as our shelves will hold, hence the reason I just bought bigger shelves."

Woodard admits she's never been a big fan of



You're not likely to mistake the Desrosiers' tasty, colorful creations for mass-flavour, store-bought marshmallows.

marshmallows, at least not the type that seemingly hide in the back of one's pantry for months, even years, until somebody feels in the mood for hot chocolate. That said, she can't get enough of the Desrosiers' key lime pie, raspberry-chocolate ganache and banoffee (bananas, whipped cream and caramel sauce) marshmallows.

"They have a different consistency than (store-bought marshmallows) and are so, so good," she says.

Aside from what's in added ingredients such as Crunchie bars or Cadbury Creme Eggs, the latter of which they utilized recently to conjure an Easter offering, the Desrosiers' marshmallows don't contain any preservatives. The sky's the limit when it comes to flavours, Brandon says, which explains why one can currently pick from among lemon meringue, Black Forest cake, cinnamon bun cream cheese and root beer float marshmallows. (Uh, you had us at root beer.)

As for what the future holds, Dena and Brandon intend to be active on the wedding circuit this summer, by setting up build-your-own-s'mores stations at receptions and socials. They're also making preliminary plans to open a bricks-and-mortar shop of their own, one that would serve coffee and tea. In the meantime, Brandon is continuing to experiment with new recipes. One of those is a sugar-free marshmallow, as personally requested by Big Smo, an American country-rap musician who discovered their biz on Instagram, and reached out to them to say that he's diabetic, and to mark him down for a sizable order, if and when they perfect it.

One more thing: If you're thinking the Desrosiers' marshmallows are too delicate to be harpooned with a stick, think again.

"To me, when you caramelize them over a fire, it brings the flavours out even more," says Brandon, who admitted, isn't the most patient person on the planet, when he's toasting marshmallows. "I don't even care if I set mine on fire because to me, nothing beats peeling off that first, charred layer, to get to the gooeyness, in the middle." Hmm, sounds yummy. Anybody got a match? For more information, go to marshmallowfactory.ca

David.sanderson@freepress.mb.ca



Dena Desrosiers shows off some of the Marshmallow Factory's more than two dozen varieties.

The marshmallows have been flying off the shelves, with salted caramel and sponge toffee and chocolate seemingly being the favourites. They've been a great addition and have attracted repeat customers, not only from town, but from the Interlake area, as well'

— Kim Flaig, one of the owners of the Cozy Fox, a newly opened shop in Selkirk wholly stocked with made-in-Manitoba products